



Community engagement and solidarity: A research project in Italy

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Summary

In Italy solidarity is considered a moral and civic value and the highest expression of human social dimension. This paper examines the utility of community engagement programs in demonstrating this value to Italian high school students. Building on the foundation of Dewey's (1938) model of experiential education, Kohlberg's (1976, 1981) concept of role-taking, and Gilligan's (1977) ethic of care, this paper analyses the learning of solidarity by students involved in service activities. It also investigates the differences and similarities between service-learning methodologies in the United States and Italy.

Implementing a mixed methods approach, quantitative data were collected from 237 students in 5 Milan-area high schools, and qualitative interviews were conducted with 33 students involved in school-coordinated community service. The research questions were related to students' definitions of solidarity and their understanding of its application in their lives. The results of the study confirmed that the

experience of service was extremely educational for the students, facilitating their awareness of a culture of solidarity both at the cognitive and behavioral levels. In light of these results, I have initiated collaborations with teachers and community partners to increase the use of service-learning in Italian schools, with a particular focus on the development of the reflection phase.

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